



**A response to Lauren Lavery and Stephanie Ng's
*() to () / place to place***

Flux Gallery, 6-19 May, 2018

**By Sarah Brereton
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When entering the small exhibition space that houses artists Lauren Lavery and Stephanie Ng's project, one is made aware of the even smaller pieces displayed within this room. Every step must be considered, as one must carefully maneuver around delicately and precariously constructed sculptures, a haphazard pile of cardboard boxes, and plastic planters filled with a miscellany of materials. The unconventionality of these small items were explained to me by Lavery when we sat down to discuss her and Ng's exhibition, *() to () / place to place*.

place to place, on view at aceartinc.'s Flux Gallery, is a collaborative experiment between the two artists.¹ The pieces were repeatedly mailed between Lavery's studio in Guelph, Canada and Ng's studio in Hong Kong, China, with each artist including new material for the other to use. This led to mainly sculptural works that have symbolic and physical layers for the viewer to piece together. The reason for the small sizes of the pieces in the exhibition is understandable since they had to fit within the parameters of the boxes the artists used to ship the works to each other.

Chance and one's lack of control play a large part in this exhibit. When I met with Lavery it was before she began installing the works. She made it clear that she was not only excited about the exhibit, but that she was quite nervous as well. This nervousness was in part because she had not seen any of the pieces that Ng had shipped from Hong Kong. Similarly, Ng had not seen the pieces Lavery had brought to install.

Viewers are invited to be witnesses to the collaborative process informing each piece, and how both had to relinquish control over the work when mailing it. In the works on paper, Ng's gestural painting practice is apparent in the quick, lattice-work scribbles, amoeba-like shapes, and swirling ribbons of colour. Lavery's contributions can be discerned in the polished cubes, lines, and use of shading, reflecting her meticulous sculpture practice.² As stated by both artists, this type of collaboration—mailing unfinished works long distances with no expectations—becomes, a challenge of aesthetics, sculptural configuration, and reaching agreement.³

The elements of chance and control are further evident with the inclusion of the boxes, which were used for the transportation of the artworks. Upon closer inspection, each box carries the marks and impressions of its travels, emphasizing their role as the carriers and protectors for the works they held, and as such they occupy a special place within the exhibition. The marks, damage, and weathered surfaces represent another aspect of the ungovernable in this collaboration.

The inclusion of these boxes in the exhibit speaks to Lavery and Ng's experimentation with the terms of value and production of materials and objects.⁴ Seemingly mundane materials such as boxes, marbles, resin, bits of wood, and cloth are manipulated and used to create new meanings and thus value. It is through the act of manipulation of the materials into a final product that provides such significance. Their piece *Untitled* (2017-2018), consisting of a constructed pile of felt and paper scraps, an orange popsicle stick, resin, and a worked piece of plasticine rests upon a purple shelf constructed by Ng and is given its own wall. Perhaps the

¹ *() to () / place to place* artist statement, Flux Gallery/aceartinc., May 2018.

² Lauren Lavery in conversation with the author, May 8, 2018.

³ *() to () / place to place* artist statement.

⁴ Lauren Lavery in conversation with the author, May 8, 2018.

saying 'One person's trash is another's treasure' would be an oversimplification of the reverence the piece is paid, but through each artists' material layering, everyday items and trash are reevaluated and celebrated, but also emphasize the accessibility of the objects which is subverted by placing them in context that complicates them.

The act of mailing such materials—many of which originally came from China—explore the value of such materials in a global sphere.⁵ The units that were originally shipped from the manufacturer had nominal individual value that suddenly increased when Lavery and Ng had to claim and declare the works for mailing. How does the shipment of an art piece across the world inform its worth? Does the act of shipping a box then become a political act? Lavery and Ng think so, as mailing packages involve taxes, declaration of contents, express shipping charges, and are subjugated to being opened and searched before their arrival.⁶ Such political analysis of their work is encouraged, as it aids in their understanding of global economics and policies between disparate cities.⁷

The physicality of the relationship between the exhibition space and the objects themselves is heavily present throughout the exhibit as well. How one views the work creates an experiential layer of the exhibition space clearly intended as a collaboration between the viewer and artwork. One has to pull aside a curtain to enter the room, and from there navigate around the works placed on the floor. Due to the sizes of the plastic planters that are part of an eight-piece series in the exhibit, and the choice to not place them on stands or plinths but rather on the floor, I found myself crouching down low to the ground to be able to see the details inside. From this perspective, I noticed many more details. Resin and scraps of wood and paper were in one, while another contained a gelatinous substance surrounded by crumbs of unknown materials. This physicality shows the artists' shared interest in the ways that space can be altered through art objects and the position of the viewer's body in relationship to placement. In another piece consisting of a canvas with materials attached to it, a wire descends from the top and continues until it almost reaches the floor. It is the small trinket that is at the end of this wire that impelled me to follow the line and bend down to see its details. Moreover, their sculptural piece *Untitled* (2017-2018) encourages the viewer to circle it in order to fully appreciate its complexities. A wooden base decorated with materials such as paint, construction paper, and a mound of cotton-candy coloured foam material with a pink and fuchsia painted circular tube hangs precariously at the top of a pole that suggests the piece be appreciated in the round, causing the viewer to occupy more space within the exhibit through movement.

Through such themes as control, chance, the value given to objects, and the consequences of collaborating despite such large distances, *() to () / place to place* provides an exploration as well as a celebration of these two artists' processes—and the rich possibilities of such partnerships.

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *() to () / place to place* artist statement, Flux Gallery/aceartinc., May 2018.

⁷ Ibid.

Bibliography

Brereton, Sarah. Conversation with Lauren Lavery. May 8, 2018.

Lavery, Lauren and Stephanie Ng. “ () to () / place to place,” artist statement, Flux Gallery/aceartinc., May 2018.